Influencing Coin Ops through PSYOP

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Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
2008		**00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Influencing Coin Ops through PSYOP	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
University of Military Intelligence,Fort Huachuca,Sierra Vista,AZ,85613	

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**12**	
unclassified	**unclassified**	**unclassified**			

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

"I believe that whenever a contingency plan is approved that identifies a potential enemy our senior military authority should issue the order "Scouts Out," implying that a few military intelligence "scouts" be dispatched to or near the future potential area of operations to observe, report, and plan for our next war, hoping that such scouts will be listened to and actions will be taken to avoid another case of too little too late and inadequate training. I know from experience that such an effort will be opposed strongly. I also know from experience that such can and must be done." [i]

General Joseph A. McChristian (USA-RET)

J-2 Military Intelligence, MACV, 1965-67

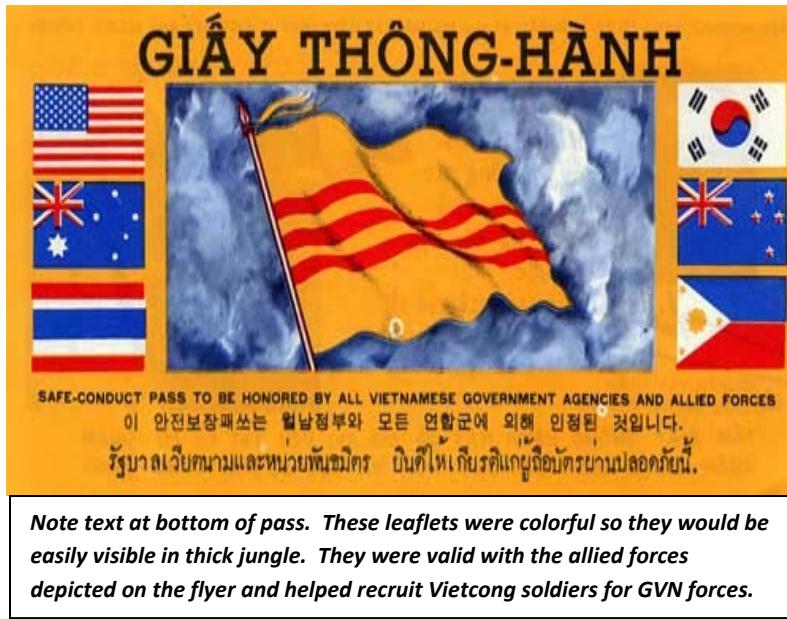*The PSYOP Motto: Persuade, Change, Influence.*

Introduction

Psychological Operations (PSYOP) should become a permanent enterprise at Battalion and Brigade Staff echelons in order to improve the army's ability to conduct pacification/civil affair missions in counterinsurgency (COIN). Integrating a specifically PSYOP/CA (Civil Affairs) trained soldier will further increase the efficiency of COIN by acting as a staff cultural liaison and advisor. This soldier would also assist in developing Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) products to maximize intelligence collection, and non-lethal targeting. This direct involvement as a staff member will help integrate pacification efforts in a commander's area of operation (AO) and improve the course of actions that are recommended to the commander.

Some of the best actionable intelligence in combat is gained by providing security for a populace, as demonstrated by pacification efforts in the Vietnam War. There were many programs that attempted to secure the mass base including the "Strategic Hamlet Program," the USMC's Combined Action Patrol (CAP) in I Corp, and the army's Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) work with the Montagnards in the Central Highlands. Unfortunately, these programs were not supported for long-term success. In order to be successful in COIN, the military must focus on pacification and learn from the CAP and CIDG examples by using PSYOP more extensively. PSYOP, the focus of this paper, is a critical component in winning popular support for mission success. After a brief examination of pacification efforts during Vietnam, three suggestions are made: 1.) to integrate PSYOP as a staff member, 2.) to include PSYOP

products to improve IPB, and 3.) expand and further develop PSYOP/HUMINT field exercises into Military Intelligence training.

Too Little, Too Late - Vietnam

There were three distinct time-phased attempts to create viable pacification programs during the Vietnam War. The first of these was the "Strategic Hamlet Program" (1961-1963) which was instituted prior to the introduction of US conventional forces in Vietnam. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) instituted this mechanism as "its first politically-cohesive pacification effort to combat insurgency and restore control over the countryside."[ii] In February 1962, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) was established to support the GVN in its COIN operations but assistance was limited to an advisory role until 1965. Further, and unfortunately, US support was divided into two separate channels: civilian and military. Maxwell Taylor was appointed US Ambassador and held responsibility for the political and economic side of US interests while MACV, initially commanded by General Paul Harkins, and later by General Westmoreland, managed military interests: this divergence of command structure was the beginning of poor command and control during the course of US involvement in Vietnam.

Note text at bottom of pass. These leaflets were colorful so they would be easily visible in thick jungle. They were valid with the allied forces depicted on the flyer and helped recruit Vietcong soldiers for GVN forces.

The Strategic Hamlet Program disintegrated in November, 1963 with South Vietnamese President Diem's assassination. However, pacification efforts were shored up by the introduction of U.S. conventional forces in 1965 in conjunction with an increased number of advisors throughout Vietnam. It is important to remember that advisors contributed significantly as early as 1961, and in some cases, as early as 1958. They continued to play an important role throughout the U.S.'s Involvement in Vietnam.

Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam – PROVN

There is a great deal of irony in that the leadership of the PROVN study commissioned by the Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson in 1965 was General Creighton Abrams. General Abrams would later replace General Westmoreland and attempt to implement the PROVN study he devised in 1966 but by 1968, it was too late. The Tet Offensive of January, 1968 was a pivotal point for American support of the Vietnam War, despite the heavy losses suffered by the National Liberation Front (the Vietcong). The PROVN study recommended that all security

forces be intermingled with GVN forces and the South Vietnamese populace and be controlled through a decentralized command structure at a provincial level. As one official at the time noted: "The key to achieving such security lays in the conduct of effective area saturation tactics, in and around populated areas, which deny Vietcong (VC) encroachment opportunities."[iii]

Unfortunately, the PROVN study was disregarded by the MACV command because it challenged the centralization of decision-making power of MACV and employed tactics that were anathema to the army that General Westmoreland commanded which was a "firepower-based army, one broadly inappropriate to the demands of counterinsurgency warfare in South Vietnam."[iv] This challenge to centralized authority is a troublesome element of military decision-making, particularly in a complex operating environment of counterinsurgency. The irony of the PROVN study culminated when General Abrams became the MACV Commander in July, 1968 and attempted to unify the firepower-based army that General Westmoreland commanded with the "one-army" effort of pacification supported by firepower capability. As Lt. Colonel John Nagl points out: "the U.S. Army's concept of how to fight and win precluded the development of a successful counterinsurgency doctrine in South Vietnam."[v]

Two other programs, The USMC's Combined Action Patrol (CAP) and the Civil Operations for Revolutionary Development (CORDS) also had success in their areas of operation. The Marines in particular had a positive impact in I Corps, but their success was never modeled by the army in other regions. CORDS was a program instituted in 1967 that unified both Civil and Military Operations and began to focus conventional armed forces towards pacification efforts

in conjunction with GVN armed forces. Unfortunately, as CORDS Deputy Robert Komer suggested: "The greatest problem with pacification was that it was not tried seriously until too late, or if not too late certainly very late in the day."[vi]

As the PROVN study pointed out, and the work of CORDS demonstrated, early implementation of tactics that focused on securing the population, isolating them from insurgents, and maintaining support of local forces until truly self-sufficient did not occur in Vietnam: PROVN was never implemented when it could have made the most impact. The misguided use of search and kill techniques, the lack of emphasis on pacification, and the overall political mismanagement of the two were significant reasons for mission failure in Vietnam.

Getting to know people and what they are thinking is a key to building relationships. People, in any theater, will be more willing to give a soldier intelligence if they feel secure. Especially if they believe that the soldier and his commanders are there to help them.

Lessons Learned – People are Everything – Recommendations

Of all branches in the U.S. Army, PSYOP and Civil Affairs (CA) are focused on host-populations (or as PSYOP describes them: target audiences). Currently, PSYOP is underused and its active component, 4th POG (Psychological Operations Group) in particular, must be further supported and increased in personnel, a process that is currently underway. Given that success in COIN is dependent on gaining the support of the host population (as David Galula and other COIN experts have suggested), it is reasonable to look to the capabilities that PSYOP may provide the Commander as a potential staff-level member equal to and co-located with the S-2/S-3. In the case of Vietnam, one of the first demands of the North Vietnamese at the Paris peace talks in 1968 was that the United States end their leaflet drops and cease all psychological operations in Vietnam.[vii] How do we accomplish greater incorporation of PSYOP on the tactical level?

1 – Inclusion of PSYOP at Staff Level

As suggested, inclusion of PSYOP as a more integral staff member at BN and BDE will have significant impact in conducting COIN operations effectively and efficiently. I recommend that a staff-capable PSYOP SGT (E-6/E-7) or ideally, a company grade officer be included as a liaison to staff structure co-equal to the S2X (counterintelligence), for example. Granted, the small-size of the PSYOP community prevents this from currently being possible, but we must recruit for future conflicts not past ones. The bottom line: the PSYOP community's size needs to be increased. Also, further inclusion of PSYOP to staffs will improve coordination between the military-civil pacification efforts in an operation. As we saw in the Vietnam War,

coordination is a complex enterprise; Including PSYOP at staff level will improve communication and efficiency.

A "PSYOPER" helping win hearts and minds with some non-lethal targeting: giving out soccer balls to improve the lives of children in the war-zone. Just one of the many project-types PSYOP conducts.

2 – Include PSYOP products to improve IPB

The US Army's success in future COIN operations will also depend on soldiers' initiative to learn and understand the intersections of culture, media and tactical and strategic implications of both non-lethal and kinetic operations. The most important 'elements' to understand are the people and cultures of the areas in which the army operates.   One such product to improve IPB's accuracy and relevance is a Vulnerabilities Matrix. This matrix focuses on three factors: motives, demographics and psychographics. (Psychographics details issues such as a community's frustrations, fears or desires, for example: peace or a specific-type of leadership, i.e., shi'a/sunni – see example below).

Vulnerabilities Matrix

Category	Approach-Approach	Approach-Avoidance	Avoidance-Avoidance
Motives			
Psycho-			

Category	Approach-Approach	Approach-Avoidance	Avoidance-Avoida
Motives			
Psycho-Graphics			
Demo-Graphics			

This type of matrix could radically improve IPB. IPB, as it currently is created, only offers limited demographical information (religious affiliation, for example) regarding a specific area of operations. Current IPB disregards factors that motivate individuals and groups to act. In many ways, IPB only provides the soldier a chance to react to information. The soldier then provides analysis and recommendations predicated on the past. A Vulnerabilities Matrix gives the analyst an improved chance to predict because motivations are analyzed which include indicators of possible future action. At the very least, it could provide parameters to improve probability of certain courses of action. Overall, products that PSYOP create are based on a target audience's actions: they offer a ground truth that IPB is sorely lacking. Understanding fears, desires (psychographics) and motivations have a significantly greater impact on future actions than simply knowing where an IED was planted yesterday. IPB needs the incorporation of PSYOP products and the specialists who create them to improve its intelligence products. To conclude this recommendation: "Given that most COIN campaigns are won or lost in the

political and psychological dimensions, the importance of communications and ideas are vital."[viii]

3 – Expand PSYOP/HUMINT field exercises in Military Intelligence training

A final suggestion is greater discussion of PSYOP's capabilities, and their potential use in IPB in the TRADOC schoolhouse environment at both enlisted and officer training levels. Increased cross-training army-wide will increase training time but may be helpful to increase coordination during mission planning and execution. I recommend that more field-based training exercises (FTX) that focus on human intelligence (HUMINT) collection be significantly increased. Further, PSYOP field training modules could be included in such HUMINT training as there are similarities in that soldiers are interacting with a TA. Further, I recommend that information gathered during a FTX be incorporated into IPB, using, for example, a Vulnerability Matrix as described earlier. Overall, this type of training would reinforce the importance of ground truth for MI professionals. To conclude, the potential of unification of effort in conducting IPB is not the sole responsibility of Military Intelligence. Together, PSYOP, CA and MI must provide the army's combat arms the products and support needed for overall mission accomplishment in COIN.

[i] McChristian, Joseph A. The Role of Military Intelligence 1965-1967. Vietnam Studies, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1974, p. 158.

[ii] Van Vien, General Cao, Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong, Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khyuen, The U.S. Adviser. *Indochina Monographs*, U.S. Army Center for Military History, Washington D.C., 1980, p. 124.

[iii] Nagl, John A. Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam. University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 159.

[iv] Ibid., p. 174. This citation is further reinforced by the mentality of the highest leadership on the part of the army during Vietnam regarding how to conduct operations and their overall affects: as Army Chief of Staff Johnson described COIN operations during the war: "We were indiscriminate in our application of firepower, in the true sense of being discriminating, because too much of it went out on a relatively random basis. If we were really oriented after people we should have been discriminating against those people that we were after and not against all people. I think we sort of devastated the countryside. Now I don't know what the alternative to that is." P. 175. As the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, it is a professional and moral obligation to find an alternative and this quote reflects utter failure of leadership and vision at the highest levels of command during Vietnam. Further, the strategic and moral failure at these levels exacerbated an already complex situation that resulted in over 58,000 American lives lost and 1.2 millions Vietnamese lives lost.

[v] Ibid., p. 176.

[vi] Ibid., p. 166. Ambassador Lodge also had difficulty changing the organizational structure of the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Nagl points out that his "vision of changing the army's orientation on offensive operations collided with the army's concept of how it wanted to fight the war and was defeated by its organizational consensus on warfighting at the expense of pacification." (p. 164.)

[vii] Mangold, Tom and John Penycate. The Tunnels of Cu Chi: The Untold Story of Vietnam. Random House, New York, 1985, p. 194.

[viii] Mangold, Tom and John Penycate. The Tunnels of Cu Chi: The Untold Story of Vietnam. Random House, New York, 1985, p. 79.